



Aim

To improve the way the MMO communicates and engages with the fishing industry, this project was commissioned to explore the engagement and capacity needs of fishers and fisher communities and the barriers engaging with government, specifically the MMO, using a behavioural lens approach.

Introduction and methodology

As the MMO and DEFRA adopt a collaborative approach to working with its stakeholders and fishing communities as defined in the Joint Fisheries Statement, there is a need to understand how the MMO can support and engage the fishing industry through learning what the barriers are that the industry face in collaborating and participating and to identify potential solutions that the MMO can deliver.

ICF were commissioned to carry out a desktop literature review and in-person interviews to identify the major barriers in engagement that fishers face. These barriers were categorised as part of a behavioural pathway within ICF's integrated model of behaviour which spans motivation, choice, execution and outcome. After the barriers were identified, ICF suggested a suite of short-term and longer-term solutions for the MMO to lead on.

Results

The model of behaviour used in the methodology was used to categorise the barriers found into four nodes along the behavioural pathway. Motivation is the conscious and unconscious cognitive processes that direct and inspire behaviour, choice is the element that focuses on the options available and the process of how to choose which options to select, execution is the opportunity and capability to perform a behaviour and finally outcome and feedback and the experience of the behaviour itself, and the impact.

The study found that fisher's motivation to join MMO's meetings can be impaired by a lack of trust in the MMO and doubts the impact of involvement. Other factors such as individualism, lack of interest, antagonism within the communities and perceived lack of skills and confidence to contribute to the discussion can hinder participation. Fishers may lose income when attending meetings and therefore may decline meetings to prioritise fishing. Long shifts and unusual working hours, along with difficult meeting locations or lack of skills using online tools may be a disincentive to participate. Finally, if fishers feel that their inputs were disregarded during meetings, fishers may feel ignored.

Solutions, similar to the barriers, range across the behavioural pathway and include trust-building campaigns, paid ambassadors or champions, training for MMO staff, specifics around agendas and goals of meetings, emails from named individuals, mixed-mode administrations of invitations, financial incentives, additional support at meetings, carrying out additional research to understand the prevalence of barriers and providing decisions in a timely manner following consultations.



Conclusions and recommendations

There is no quick fix to increasing engagement as the barriers ranged along the behavioural pathway, and the MMO will need to implement a range of interventions and solutions rather than relying on a single approach, for example emails to named individuals for an invitation to a meeting could increase the participation at that meeting. Testing of solutions is recommended to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency. Recommendations include further work for the MMO to implement the potential solutions and evaluate any interventions tested. Specific recommendations include the following: a) understand the attitudes and experiences of front-line staff b) undertake research to understand the structure of MEO teams to include turnover, training, operational support etc, c) undertake research to understand the prevalence of barriers and d) implement interventions and prioritise increasing trust in the MMO, increasing the belief that consultation exercises will have an impact, improving the cost-benefit of taking part in consultations and ensuring events are easy to attend.

MMO comments

Unfortunately, due to stakeholder fatigue, many of the stakeholders that were asked to be involved with interviews did not participate in the study. However, the literature carried out within the review provided a clear understanding of the barriers that fishers face in communicating and engaging with government for fisheries management but may not be specific to the MMO at the present time.

It should also be noted that testing some of the solutions may come with unintended consequences and that these need to be considered before any testing occurs as well as considering the impact of testing solutions and resorting back to previous methods of engagement or inconsistency with how the MMO engage different groups of fishers.

Further information

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